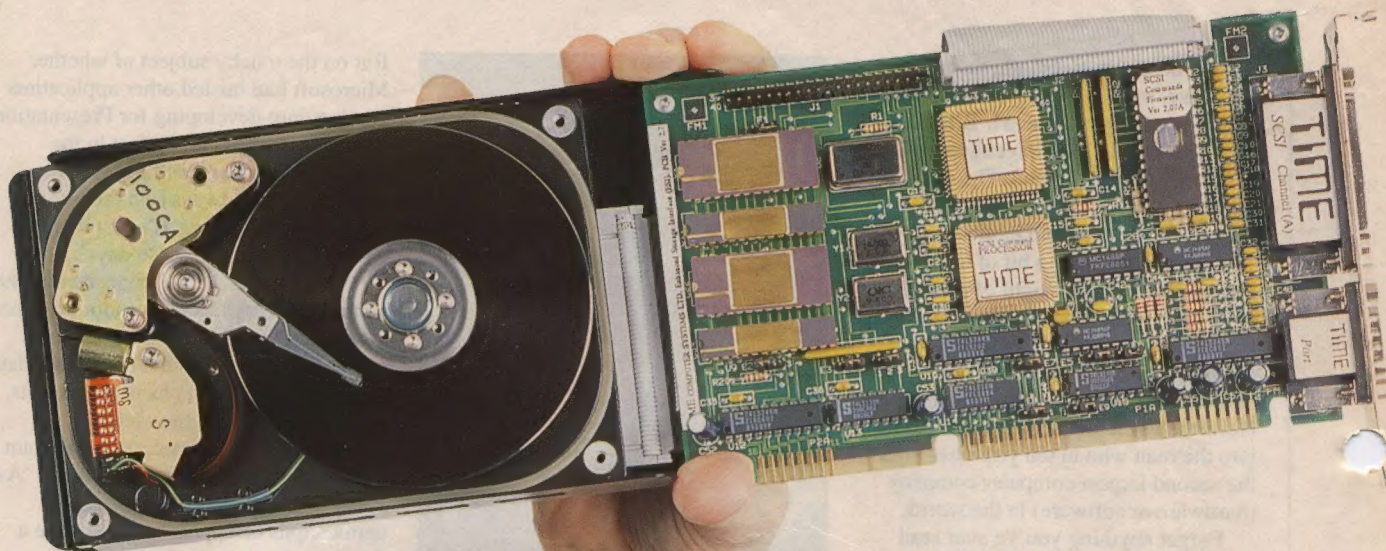# A new soul for the old machine

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Slimcard XL 40	40	24	XT/AT	£299
Slimcard 40	40	24	XT/AT	£349
Slimcard 100	105	19	AT	£599

Slimcards belong to the Smartcard family but are so thin that they only take a single expansion slot.

Requirements

8088, 8086, 286, 386sx, 386, 486 PC compatibles with ISA (or EISA) standard expansion slots. Require 1.5 slots (except slimcards- require only a single slot). Smartcard 40 & 200 and slimcard 100 require 16bit AT slots. DOS 3.3 or higher. Novell 2.15 drivers available. Please specify your PC type and software pack option when ordering. Framework II only available in 3.5" floppy disc format.

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PAUL STEPHENS

It's been a busy month, to say the least, with the key event an opportunity to meet Mr Bill Gates, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Microsoft Corporation. The occasion was Bill's flying visit to Microsoft's 'Localisation' plant in Dublin.

'Meet' is actually a bit of an exaggeration; in fact eight of us had an eight am (!) question-and-answer session with Bill, who arrived flanked by two top-brass minders, the heads of Microsoft's European and UK divisions. Nevertheless it provided a good insight into the man who in ten years has built the second largest computer company (hardware or software) in the world.

Forget anything you've ever read about Bill Gates being a Peter Pan adolescent techie. In fact he's a prime example of that peculiarly-American breed, the ace product developer who is also a skilled entrepreneur. Clearly in command of his facts on both the technical and business sides, he's a humourous and slightly combative interviewee, who answers questions confidently and isn't afraid to dismiss those he thinks are loaded or inaccurate.

What Bill likes to talk about right now is 'information at your fingertips', which involves groups of computers working together to put that vital data at the end of your mouse pointer. The 'data' is not, of course, limited to boring old facts and figures; beyond the graphs, charts and low-resolution images already in use lie sound, near-photographic quality images and moving video. The ideal environment for this 'Multimedia' information system is a graphical, windowed one such as... well, *Windows*. To help it happen, Microsoft has defined basic standards for a 'Multimedia *Windows*' system, bought 26 percent of Dorland Kindersley, a US-based book publisher, to publish its titles on CD-ROM, and assigned over 500 people to its *LAN Manager* networking product development team.

Bill's also very keen on *Pen Windows*, which consists basically of ordinary *Windows* with extensions for handwriting recognition and 'gesture'-based control, effected through a device which acts as both display screen and input tablet. This he sees as the answer for portable computing, allowing people to use machines in circumstances where

a clickety-clacking keyboard would be judged 'antisocial' (such as, for example, a group of eight journalists interviewing him), as well as offering access to computing in general to those who find the keyboard too much of an obstacle. 'The mouse was ridiculed in its day', he told us, 'so is the pen at the moment, but it will be very significant'.

What journalists want to talk to Bill about right now is the future (or otherwise) of OS/2 and its Presentation Manager (PM) graphical front end, which look increasingly threatened by the prospect of an all-singing, all-dancing 386-based *Windows 32* package. Bill in turn is still quite keen to talk about OS/2, but no longer as a wide-based general-purpose operating system, rather as a specialist high-end product for network file servers and other 'mission critical' applications.

This of course wasn't the strategy even a year ago, and he admitted that there had been a change of heart, brought about entirely by the massive customer response to *Windows*. These days he couldn't think of a single customer where OS/2 outranked *Windows,* and had come to believe that many users wouldn't feel the need to make the jump up to the bigger system.

But on the touchy subject of whether Microsoft had misled other application vendors into developing for Presentation Manager, while heading fast in the *Windows* direction itself, he was adamant – 'we always told them to develop for *Windows*. It's just that no-one was listening in those days'.

Nevertheless, he did concede that the situation for application vendors will not get any easier with the move towards object orientation (OOPS), in which data 'objects', such as graphs or documents, move freely around the system accompanied by the necessary program code to display, print and edit them. 'As you get into object orientation, the applications disappear and you have a data-centric view. In fact you don't run applications at all, just work with data. One of the dilemmas of the OOPS system is to have a design that allows for substitute application code supporting the objects.' Good egalitarian views from the person who's going to be supplying the object-orientated environment, but I was still left thinking that having 'Microsoft' on the box would do the hidden, object-oriented *Excel* and *Word for Windows* of the mid-1990's no harm at all.

HOME AND AWAY

As Bill jetted out of Dublin *en route* for Switzerland, for me it was home to beautiful Bath, and then straight back to London the following day for a clutch of product launches.

First up was Borland's launch of *Turbo Pascal for Windows.* Regular readers will remember Borland's extraordinary *Paradox 3.5* event last year, with its stand-up routines and birthday cake – this one was much better organised (the audio-visual equipment worked, for a start), but still retained what I'm fast coming to know and love as the Borland family atmosphere.

Most big software companies present a very 'corporate' image these days, based clearly on IBM's – technical excellence, yes, but all under the strict control of a management who understand that Business Comes First. With Borland, it's the opposite – good management, yes, but of a company that's basically led by its technology.

At Borland launches, people fly in from California and talk enthusiastically

about their products for as long as Rikke Helms, the UK division's MD, will let them. This time it was Eugene Wang, Vice President of Languages, who not only told us what a good thing *TPW* is, but conducted that bravest of things, a real-time programming demonstration (the fact that it crashed a couple of times didn't matter – if it hadn't, we would have suspected an almighty pre-programmed con trick anyway).

He also spoke with evident pride of how Borland's early adoption of Object Oriented development techniques was now paying off in terms of consistent, re-useable software elements that could be employed right across its range of language and applications. Accompanied by slides filled with jokes and featuring 'Pascal Hal', Borland's representative would-be *Windows* developer, the talk left me, at least, with the impression that Scotts Valley, CA, must be a seriously fun place for a software wizard to work.

What's more *Turbo Pascal for Windows* itself looks good – for £150 you get a complete package that needs no separate *Windows* Software Developers Kit (SDK), features a compiler in which you can write either 'straight' third-generation Pascal or go Object-Oriented, and supplies you with its own 'ObjectWindows' object library to get you started. You also get the *Whitewater Resource Tookit* for designing icons, menus and dialogs, plus Borland's well-established *Turbo Debugger*, as well as a hypertext-structured help system and a whole bag full of manuals describing both Pascal and *Windows* programming. Not even Borland could make this lot run on a PC/XT; you'll need at least a 286 with 2 Mbytes of RAM, but for a *Windows* developer that would seem a sensible move anyway.

After all that I suppose it's a bit churlish to say 'great – but it's a shame it's Pascal', especially as this will get me into even more trouble with the Pascal Fan Club. Nevertheless, when you get to my age you start thinking that life's too short to hand-code a procedure. At anything higher than operating-system level development, 'Objects' should pop up on screen, ready for you to discuss their properties with the development software – which, despite its name, is not what happens in Borland's *ObjectVision* either. Next year, perhaps.

Another engagement forced me to miss Borland's second speaker, Anders Hejlsberg, who is the Principal Engineer on the *Turbo Pascal* project. At the time I was tempted to stay on, as Anders has been closely linked with *Turbo* since the very first version. But my sense of duty won the day, and off I went.

To be quite frank I wasn't expecting too much of the other event, the launch

of a new 'information retrieval and analysis system' – such products appear at regular intervals, and disappear with similar regularity too. Happily though I ended up being very glad I'd gone.

Forest and Trees is a *Windows*-based product (there are also versions for MS-DOS and Hewlett-Packard's *NewWave*) which gathers together information from a variety of sources, then proceeds to assemble it into reports, graphs and 'alarms', which it displays for you in little windows on your PC desktop.

The basic 'engine' is a Structured Query Language (SQL) generator, which can be used to extract data from *dBASE* and *Paradox* database files, Lotus *1-2-3* and Microsoft *Excel* spreadsheets, SQL servers on PC-based networks, and even databases running on IBM's AS400 minicomputers. In the *Windows* version, you create your query by clicking the mouse on various options concerning the information you want, and how you want it presented. Once you've done that, you can tell it that you want the query to be run automatically at set intervals or times of day.

Having set up a variety of queries, you can tell the system to connect them together, for example combining the figures from a sales database with that of a purchase accounting system to give you a view of your day's trading. The 'alarms' are triggered according to your specifications, so if sales fall below 80 percent of last month's average, a box can pop up warning you to have serious words with the sales manager.

The thing I really like about this product is its fitness for purpose, an attribute which is always hard to appreciate until you see it in context. Arriving late, I was lucky enough to get an individual demonstration from Michael Skok, boss of European Software Publishing, UK distributors of the package.

He worked through setting up an example system, bringing in data from a variety of local and networked sources. Suddenly, there was every manager's dream – a flight deck instrument panel for a business, showing how the day's trading was going, how it had been going for the past few months, and what problems needed attention.

Now we've all known for some time that this can be done – provided, like Marks and Spencers or Sainsbury's, you're willing to invest millions in a custom-built, fully integrated information system. But retro-fitting it to the rag-bag of assorted databases, spreadsheets and accounting packages in which most real-life businesses' vital data resides is something else indeed. And doing it in a way that seems genuinely painless and risk-free is stretching the bounds of reality.

> ### 'We always told them to develop for Windows. It's just that no-one was listening in those days' – Bill Gates

Information at your fingertips indeed – full review next month.

ALMOST HOME
My final stop of the day was with Opensoft, who were launching *Memory Commander*. This can best be described as 'the memory manager to end all memory managers', and is a program for loading all your device drivers and TSR (Terminate and Stay Resident) programs into those various hidey-holes that exist between 640K and 1 Mbyte in your PC's memory map, thus freeing more of the 'base' memory for running programs.

It will also relocate your video RAM (to make bigger contiguous blocks for loading the TSRs), simulate Expanded memory on a 386 processor, and manage your extended memory as well. In extreme circumstances (single page text-only display) it can provide just over 900K of memory for MS-DOS programs to use, which is quite something.

Unlike other such programs, it does all this in a reasonably user-friendly way, allowing you to experiment interactively with an on-screen display to show you what's been put where. It will even 'remember' what memory configurations particular applications will work with, and adjust itself automatically when they are loaded.

Memory Commander costs £50, and for the price is quite brilliant. That said, I think it's unbelievable that on hardware fitted with megabytes of RAM we need to spend time relocating 30K device drivers to squeeze worksheet files into memory. As Bill Gates said before, 'there are still some real unsolved problems around.' You bet, Bill. ●

SHAREWARE SCENE

This month we feature new programs for Microsoft's Windows *in our survey of the latest PC shareware products. Huw Collingbourne reports.*

SHAREWARE

SHAREWARE NEWS

Any discerning computer user must surely recognise that the crowning glory of the programmer's art is the adventure game. Never mind spreadsheets, databases or word processors – these are all trivial by comparison with the well-designed adventure.
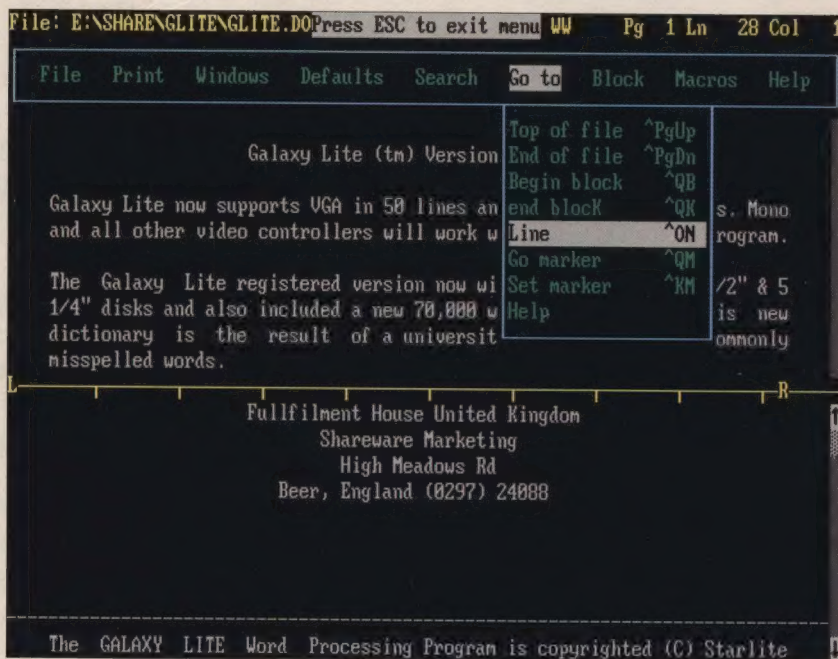
In my experience, it is in the much-maligned area of 'leisure software' that you will find some of the best and most creative use of graphics, text and user interfaces. It just goes to show that this really is a subject worthy of serious consideration. Anyway, that's my story and I'm sticking to it. And it's my excuse for including a shareware adventure game among the reviews this month.

If you are interested in adventure games, the shareware

catalogues have plenty to offer. Of historical interest is *Colossal Cave* (sometimes called the Original Adventure). Pre-dating even Infocom's classic *Zork*, this is the game that started it all. C programmers should note that you can also get the source code on disk.

British authors have been responsible for some good text adventures. Graham Cluley's *Humbug* and *Jacaranda Jim* have been included on PC PLUS *SuperDisks.*

Another recently-launched UK adventure caught my attention with its gloriously silly title – *Aliens Laughed At My Cardigan.* I'd also recommend a game called *The Golden Wombat of Destiny,* but modesty forbids this since I wrote it myself. Well, if you are really going to support the public domain and shareware philosophy, don't just use it – write it!

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● One of the best shareware word processors, *Galaxy* (shown above), has recently been updated and renamed. Version 3 of this program will go by the name *Nova* (at £59.95 registration). An earlier version has now been named *Galaxy Lite.* On registration (£29), a 70,000 words spelling checker is provided.

● If logic games are to your taste, take a look at *Matchplay* (£9.50). This novel saga assembles five girls, their five boyfriends, five pets and five favourite foods. All you have to do is match up foods, pets, boyfriends and girls in the correct order by solving a set of clues.

● Now to more serious matters – namely money. *Checkmate Plus* ($60 registration) is an updated 'chequebook-based' accounting package for personal or business use. Alternatively, *Wincheck* ($30 registration) provides cheque-book control for those who prefer to count their cash in the *Windows* environment.

● How would you like to amaze all your friends and aquaintance with your compendious literary knowledge? Well, *Romeo and Juliet* ($15 registration) could be just the thing for you! Menu-driven quizzes, games and notes guide you through the intricacies of Shakespeare's tragedy. From the same shareware author as *Macbeth* and *Lord Of The Flies,* this could also be very useful for students. On the other hand, you might just prefer to read the original text. Or am I missing the point?